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Christmas '86

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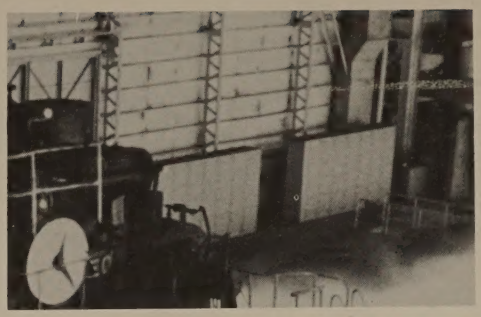

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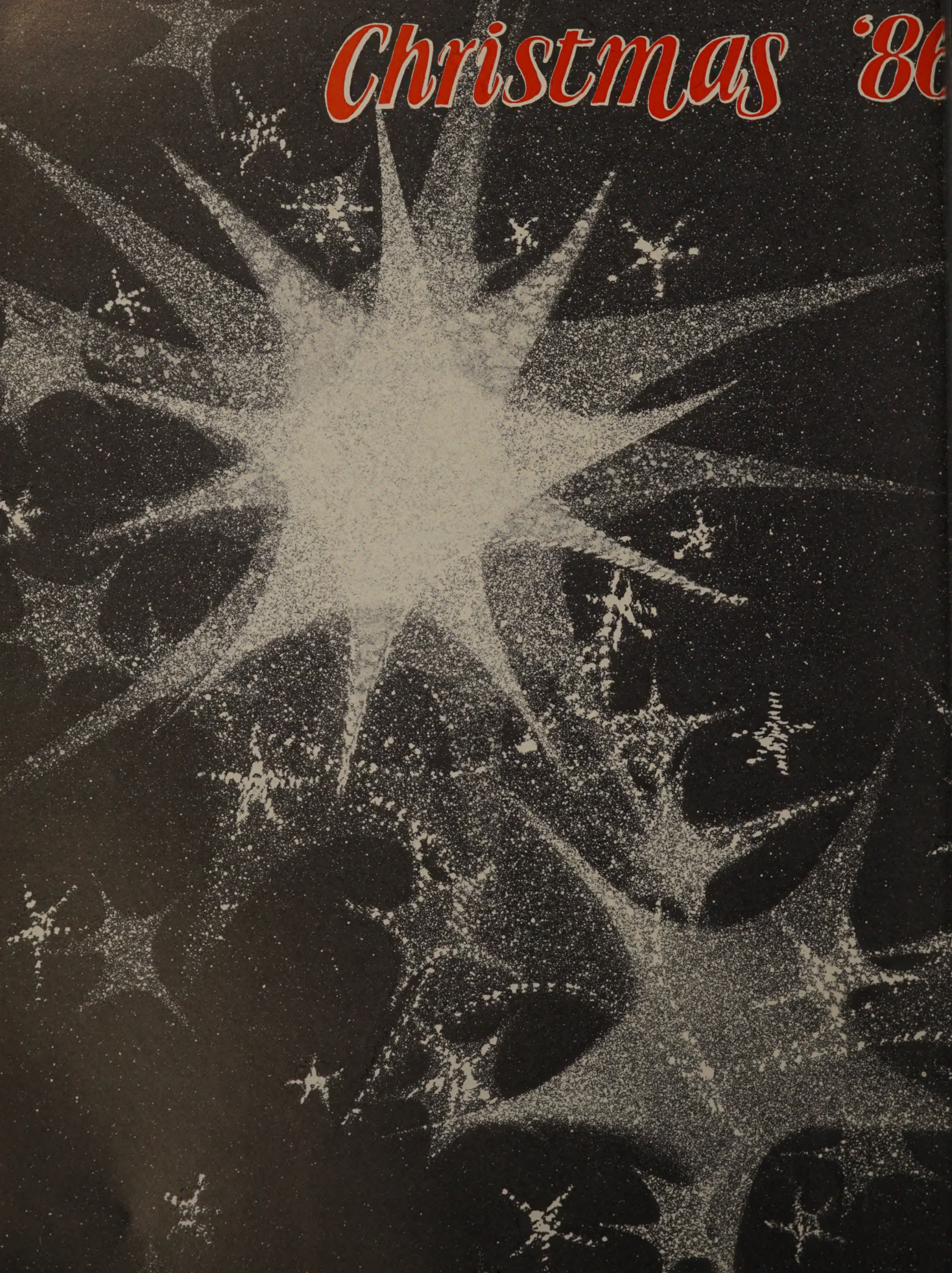

Christmas '8

CHRISTMAS, and the Invisible became visible, the Word became flesh, the Uncreated appeared in creation, light broke through darkness.

Lights, colors, gifts, greetings, nativity scenes, and brightly decorated trees, music and singing ... are not out of place, then, on this day; but there is more to Christmas than this.

This unique Christian celebration should imprint a conviction in our hearts with an unshakeable faith and an overwhelming certainty: God came on earth for us, there can be no doubt that he loves us.

We are loved, God himself loves us; everything then is easier for us here on earth; everything is more understandable.

Behind the seemingly dark moments of our existence we discover the trace of his love, a motive often mysterious for us, but still a motive of love.

Pain then can be more easily endured, and joyful events are even richer for beyond the happy moments of life—like love blossoming in one's heart like the birth of a child or an unexpected touch of good luck—we discover the loving providence of a Father.

Everything becomes possible! If we believe in God, and in his love, no obstacles are insurmountable not even those preventing our planet, our common cradle, from attaining a life of peace.

Yes, everything is possible. Or better, if the Almighty has come among us we can hope for even more.

We can trust that, hoping in it and asking for it with all our hearts, our world may advance towards unity: unity among generations, social classes, races, unity among Christians who have been divided for centuries, among faithful of different religions, among nations.

Unity! It is an ideal that goes with our times. Many young people in the world believe in it with the enthusiasm typical of their age, and they work towards this goal with the energy of their years.

We let them dream and work, for the child whose birthday we celebrate today had no less a dream.

He came on earth so that all may be one.

He gave his life so that his dream may be fulfilled.

CHIARA LUBICH

The unexpected guest

Just like every other year we were preparing to spend our Christmas vacation with our relatives on the east coast. As always, our four children were the most excited, and the prospect of Christmas made them unusually well-behaved and willing to help.

This year, though, there was more involved. There was an excitement that seemed to be coming from a desire to make up for lost time as far as family unity was concerned. Perhaps it was because we had gone to the Mariapolis that summer—for the first time—and it awakened a sensitivity among us, leading us to discover the joyful dimension of Christianity as well as so many other families who had joys and struggles similar to our own.

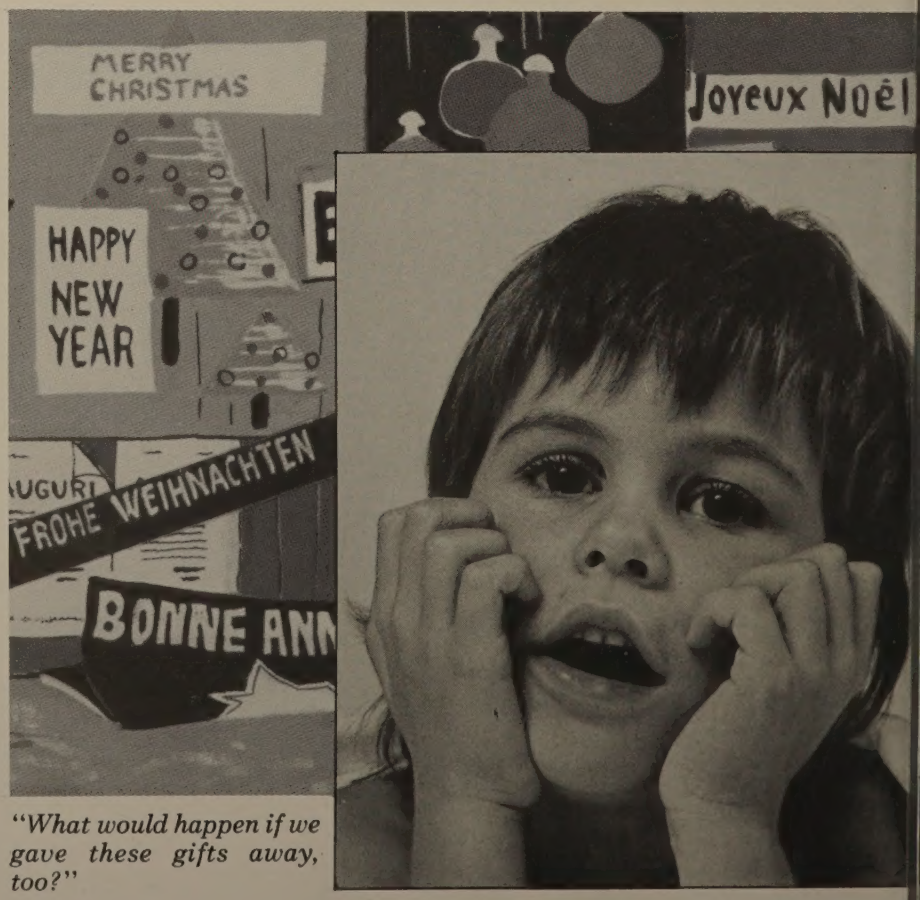
Our bags were just about packed when a fateful phone call came. Sylvia, a friend of ours who's a social worker, was distressed about a boy in a grouphome who had nowhere to go for the holidays. Other children had a relative or friend to go to, and the home would be a lonely place. She was wondering if we didn't know someone who could take in this boy and make him feel the warmth of a family.

She said we could think it over but my wife and I had already decided... even if it meant changing our plans. Our thoughts turned to our four. Would they be willing to give up Christmas with grandma and grandpa to welcome a stranger into our home? To our surprise—(the "Mariapolis effect" was still working!) they gave their approval. The social worker was thrilled and suggested we meet the boy first before taking him home.

Two days later we went to meet Sylvia, the social worker and Eliot, at the grouphome. They were all children who had been through a lot. We had prepared ourselves to meet a "difficult child" but it was heartbreaking to see how pathetic he was. As soon as he saw us he withdrew to a bench in a corner of the room. Sylvia encouraged him, "Come on, Eliot, these people want to be your friends. They would like you to spend Christmas with them. Wouldn't you like that?" He didn't answer, he just glanced defiantly in our direction.

Well, the visit didn't offer much promise but we all wanted stick by our decision. The traumas and hurts he must have gone through made our joy—in welcoming him as Jesus in one of his least—all the greater. "What could be more in the spirit of Christmas,?" we thought.

Three days later we returned to pick Eliot up. I was glad George, our littlest, wanted to come along. In the car Eliot continued to sulk and be belligerent but, in all innocence, George didn't seem to notice. He barraged him with questions until he found Eliot's favorite topic. "Are you a Dodger fan?" Eliot's eyes momentarily lit up. "No, I'm for the Mets." He had let it slip out and now the ice was broken as they jabbered on about their favorite players. You'd think they were peers



"What would happen if we gave these gifts away, too?"

but Eliot was 7 years older than George. Perhaps his traumatized background had slowed down his development....

"Would you like to help us set the Christmas crib and decorate the tree?" He flashed us his bored look and held back, but he couldn't resist for long. Eliot seemed to pass from one discovery to the other, from disbelief to continual amazement that people could be genuinely interested in him. When on Christmas morning he found a gift with his name on it under the tree he could no longer hide his feelings... A smile broke out.

We considered him as one of us during those five days and if we felt particularly united that Christmas we knew Eliot had had a lot to do with it. When the time came to take him back to the grouphome we knew it wouldn't be "goodbye" but "see you soon." We had become his family and we would remain beside him in what was to be Eliot's not so easy journey toward believing in love.

O. P.

The game of the hundredfold

Christmas can be Christmas even without the perennial trimmings of gifts, candies, and the rest. This was the conviction my wife, Sue, and I tried to get across to the children each year. By now they knew it wasn't the end of the world if we didn't have a turkey on the table Christmas day; they had adapted to the ups and downs of our family economy. But when the children actually saw a turkey arrive (along with a gallon of egg nog which didn't interest them particularly) a few days before Christmas they welcomed it with enthusiasm.

Their faces fell in disbelief though when the turkey departed almost as quickly as it came. A friend had told us about a family in financial straits. The father was in jail and the mother would be alone with the children facing a bleak Christmas.

Sue and I thought of sharing what we had... and that included the turkey, certain that somehow our family wouldn't suffer for our generosity. The wife was moved to tears when she saw the turkey but her joy wasn't enough to console our children, the youngest of whom was five.

The scene changed, though, the next day when someone else came by to wish us a Merry Christmas and brought a bigger turkey yet and a bottle of champagne. The children's faces quickly brightened. Words were not necessary to convince them that God's providence is real and that he gives the hundredfold to those who love him.

But once again what we had received wasn't destined to remain with us for very long. That same evening we heard about a lady in the hospital who had also lost her job. Sue and I looked at each other and we had the same thought. Our two oldest boys started to protest. Calmly we explained that this lady had children and since we had more we could cheer up somebody who had less. They remained serious for a while before finally giving their approval that it was the right thing to do.

At home again after sharing with that family we found the children generally glad they had made the sacrifice even though every once in a while we'd hear "What are *we* going to eat for Christmas?"

The next day was the day before Christmas Eve. We received a phone call from my boss. "Pass by my house. I have something for you". By now we shouldn't have been so surprised. There they were: a 22 pound turkey, a bottle of champagne, two boxes of chocolates, and two cakes. The children were impressed "Jesus must really love us a lot."

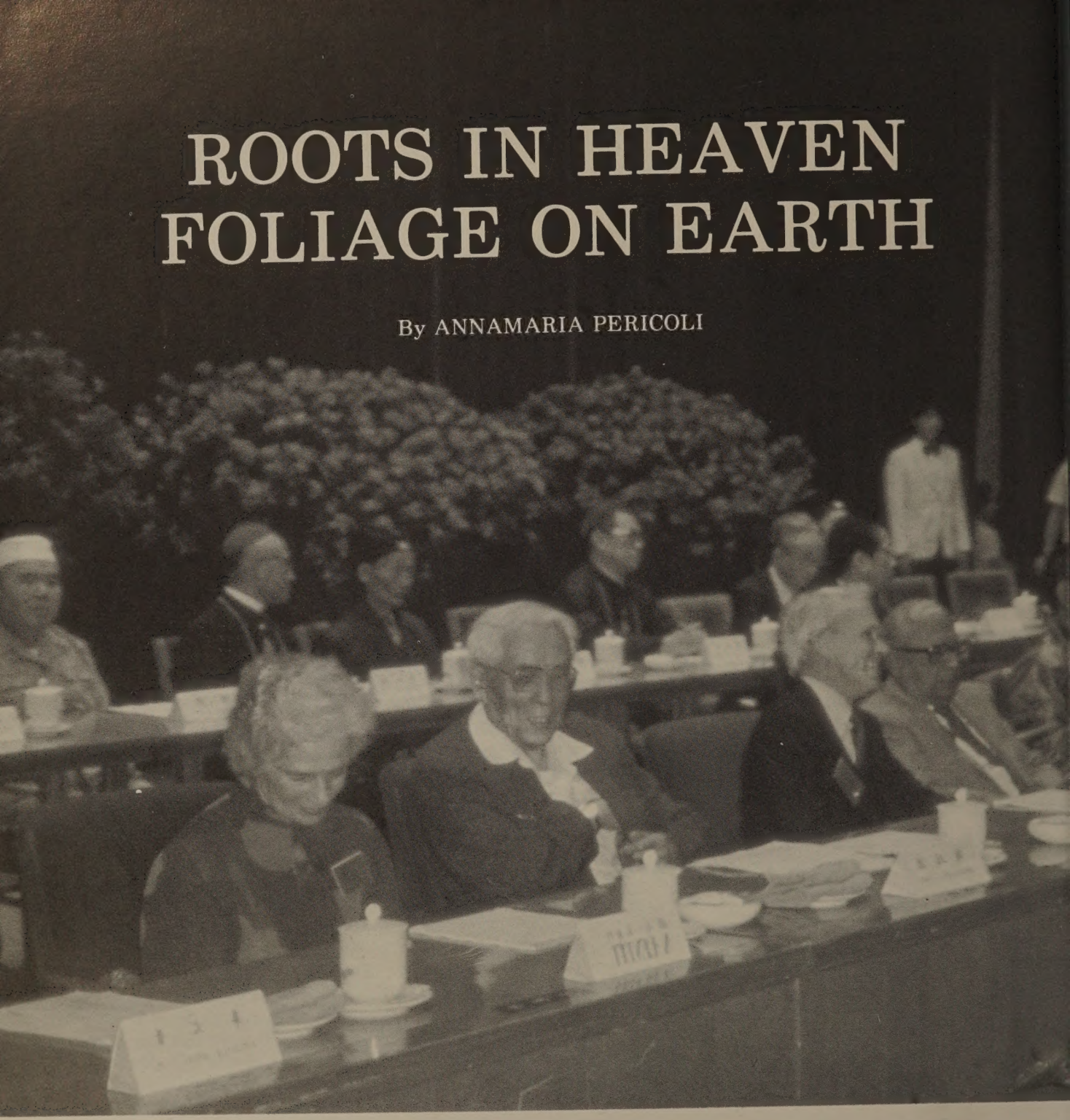
But the story didn't end here. Sue and I split up the food and headed off in two different directions. By now, though, the children were really into the spirit of what we were doing. The littlest said: "It's so beautiful to live the gospel!" And the eldest, "Now let's see what happens."

Finally Christmas Eve arrived and with it a friend bringing a cheese cake plus the "regular" list of turkey, chocolates and champagne. It brought tears to our eyes. The children were ecstatic. With a mischievous grin our eldest spoke up, "What will happen if we give them away?"

F.E.

ROOTS IN HEAVEN FOLIAGE ON EARTH

By ANNAMARIA PERICOLI



From June 25th to 30th, in the People's Republic of China representatives of 11 faiths belonging to the International Council of the World Conference on Religion and Peace met in a spirit of inter-religious dialogue. The theme was: "Peace through Work and Prayer."

Representatives of eleven religions from thirty countries and five continents met together from June 25th to the 30th in Peking. It was the International Council of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP). About 100 religious leaders plus thirty Chinese representatives of the five recognized religions came together. Among them one could see Confucianists, Buddhists, Lamas from Tibet and Mongolia, Taoists, Muslims, Catholics and Protestants (Chinese Christians are officially divided into these two groups).

The Vice President of the People's Republic of China, U Lan Fu, himself, participated in the three official dinners offered to the group. Everything took place in an atmosphere of special cordiality, in the exquisite style for which China is well-known. In the brief address to the group, U Lan Fu affirmed among other things, that if in the past one could not speak of religious freedom in China, "Now we are open and wish ►

Natalia Dallapiccola of the Focolare Movement, Shelley Elkayam, a Jew from Jerusalem working in the youth sector of the WCRP, and H. Singh, an Indian Sikh, in the garden of the Temple of Heavenly Peace.

that all be free to believe as they choose."

The six days of the conference were interesting ones and included an element of surprise when entry permits were given to delegations of the WCRP coming from Israel, South Africa and South Korea, countries with which China does not have diplomatic relations. The fact certainly did not carry political recognition on China's part, however, a daily newspaper from Hong Kong did not hesitate to call it a "a good sign." It was certainly also a good sign that a delegation from the People's Republic of China was sent for the first time to Seoul to participate in the Assembly of the Asian section of WCRP which also took place in June. That gathering involved 200 religious leaders from all over Asia.

The Chinese population today counts more than a billion people. New openness towards the rest of the world is creating a desire to seek in its own cultural patrimony a future that goes in hand with the future of the rest of the world. It's easy to understand, therefore, as Reverend Nikkyo Niwano affirmed in the inaugural address that "China plays a decisive role when it comes to world peace." He noted with satisfaction the success of the great effort of Chinese religious groups to make a gathering such as this one possible in Peking itself. Zhao Pu Chu a well-known Buddhist layman who is an important government official and the head of the Chinese Buddhist Association was the patient mediator.

It was however Panchen Lama, honorary president of the same Chinese Buddhist Association, who emphasized the significant role the religions of the world can exert on behalf of peace. Mr. Panchen Lama is the leader of Tibetan Buddhism in China.

Roman Catholics were represented by Archbishop Angelo Fernandes of New Delhi, President emeritus of the WCRP. There were also representatives of Pax Christi and the Focolare Movement. They, too, had an important role in the Peking Conference. Natalia Dallapiccola who is a member of the International Council of the WCRP read a message from Chiara Lubich and gave one of the three keynote talks together with Mr. Zhao Pu Chu and Inamullah Khan a Muslim from Pakistan.

The title of the Conference was "Peace through Work and Prayer." Sub-themes developed by co-presidents of the WCRP —Jacqueline Rouge', (a Catholic from Paris) and Norma Levitt, (a Jew from the United States) —were, "Life and Work in our Multi-cultural Societies," "Religion, Cause or Cure of Conflicts?" and "The Contribution of Religion to Education for Peace and Justice."

The context in which the Congress was taking place, that is, Asia in its great variety of cultures and religions, seemed to make very pressing "the need to harmonize variety without letting oneself be satisfied with mutual tolerance but continuing to strive to achieve mutual acceptance," as Reverend Niwano pointed out. He spoke of guarding against any idea of one culture being superior or more acceptable than another. "Everyone is aware of how many conflicts in history have derived from such an attitude."

Intense was the work yet the atmosphere of mutual appreciation and dialogue during the six days of meetings found their launching pad in prayer. Every morning in successive sessions Hindus, Muslems, Jews and Buddhists prayed. It was Nikkyo Niwano who commented that "It is often said that 'disarmament equals peace.' However, it is also true that disarmament is unthinkable without having first established an atmosphere of respect, trust,

Chiara's message to the Members of the International Council of the World Conference on Religion and Peace

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Members of the International Council:

You are meeting for the first time since the Fourth Assembly in Nairobi, nearly two years ago, in order to face the urgent problems related to the "decisive turning point" which the Assembly desired and initiated in the Conference. Therefore, I would like to express to the Secretary General, Dr. Taylor, to the Executive Committee and to all the members of the International Council the solidarity of the Focolare Movement and my personal cordial best wishes.

The existence and importance of the WCRP is acknowledged and appreciated by all the major religious communities of the world.

Many steps forward have been taken and the very ideals of "global peace" for which the Conference has worked, have been placed into focus again and have won a place in the hearts of millions of people.

This has taken place against a background of an increasingly darker scenario for world peace.

We could almost say that the development of the WCRP has emerged all the more due to the growing uncertainty of humanity and the fear of new and serious conflicts. It is impossible not to recognize in this development of the WCRP a consoling confirmation that the will for peace is at least as strong as the incentive toward war and that God blesses every effort made in favor of life and reconciliation among all people.

This is why the role and goals of the WCRP surpasses the limitations of the association. The WCRP acts as a catalyst of the will for peace which is intrinsic to the spiritual message of every religion. It sets itself as a model for multi-religious initiatives and as a laboratory of guidelines offered to all people of good will.

Certainly the responsibility that the world situation places on the shoulders of people of faith today is enormous. It is an unprecedented challenge and we can understand how this burden can weigh heavily on those who are at the heart of the larger inter-religious associations for peace. We can understand also how the task to embrace "all religions, all regions, and all aspects of peace" can seem at times exaggerated andpresumptuous. This is why you rightly want to imbue your activities with prayer and meditation in order to draw on spiritual resources without which it would be folly to believe in and work for the ideals of the WCRP. Peace is, in fact, like a great tree that has its roots in heaven and its foliage on earth. Without prayer, it would be like a tree lacking roots and without your work it would be, as it were, lacking branches and fruit.

Surely for those who set out to move the mountains of hatred and violence the task is immense and heavy. But what is impossible to millions of isolated and divided persons can become possible to a group of people who have made reciprocal understanding, respect and the willingness to sacrifice themselves for others the essential motive of their lives. Gandhi had said: "I wouldn't want to live in this world if it weren't a world destined to be one." Many of us feel the same way today. It is for this reason that we strive to work and to pray for the unity of all people.

Peace is the first fruit of unity. But there can be no peace among nations if we do not begin to build unity among a few persons of good will. Planetary unity would seem to be an unattainable dream if there were not already proof that it can come true in those which are the signs of the times.

While the twentieth century witnessed the birth and development of ecumenism among Christians, the year 2000 already shows signs (and one of these is the WCRP) of a dialogue and collaboration among the religions of the world that up to now has had no equal.

In this prospective and with these hopes, I send my best wishes for your work and I pray every day that the Spirit of God may be upon all and among all.

collaboration, thereby overcoming diffidence and suspicion. Wouldn't it perhaps be better to say that 'peace equals disarmament'?"

The various initiatives of the WCRP were examined from the viewpoint of method and organization. Decisions were made to strengthen the national committees so as to better face the different situations of conflicts. They looked at how spiritual forces could be more directed towards the solution of concrete situations in the fields of disarmament, human rights, racial problems, aid to countries struck by natural disasters or to countries which are not in a position to utilize their own resources. Projects for peace in areas of tension especially South Africa, Sri Lanka and Korea were also dealt with.

The plan to help the drought regions of Africa has been carried out with great results in ►

accordance with the commitments made during the 1984 Assembly of Nairobi. The goal of $400,000 has been almost entirely reached with great help from the Rissho Kosei-kai.

Also the role of youth for peace was highlighted through experiences related by several delegates. During the meeting in Peking the need for an always deeper understanding and commitment to bring about a greater sense of universality

Norma Levitt (USA), one of the co-president's of the WCRP with Zhao Pu Chu, head of the Chinese Buddhist Association.

and solidarity with the great family of humanity was also discussed especially in this year declared by the United Nations as the "Year of Peace."

As the International Council closed its session it looked ahead to the next important step which is going to be the meeting of the General Assembly of the WCRP in Melbourne, Australia in 1988. It will coincide with the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Australian nation.

The spiritual contribution for peace

By NATALIA DALLAPICCOLA

The following is the text of the introductory talk given by Natalia Dallapiccola during the conference.

Reflecting on the contribution that the spiritual life can make towards building peace, I spontaneously wish to offer you an experience which began many years ago in a small city in the north of Italy.

Everything began during the last world war. The violence and destruction caused by that war, in one of the most bombarded cities of Italy, set the stage for the beginnings of a divine adventure which has transformed the lives of thousands of people from every country, ethnic group, religion and age.

The first spark of this fire came from Chiara.— The departure point, the primordial idea was the discovery that God is Love. It was as if a light had been turned on. "From that moment," Chiara writes, "I could discern that God is present everywhere with his love: in my days and in my nights, in the joyful events and in sad situations and difficulties. He is always present. He is everywhere and he explains things to me. What does he explain to me? He explains that everything is love: what I am and what happens to me; what we are and what concerns us. He explains that I am his daughter and he is my Father. His love embraces everything, even the mistakes that I make, because he allows them to happen. He explains that his love envelops the world, the universe. He sustains me and he opens my eyes. He shows me that everything and everyone is the fruit of his love. The change has taken place: I know who God is. God is Love."

At that time *we were a small group of girls with whom Chiara shared each one of her "discoveries." Also each one of us was aware of the reality that God is Love. We were convinced of it in the deepest recesses of our hearts.*

We believed in love. It became our new way of life. While God revealed himself as being our Father, we woke up to the fact that we were his children and we could respond to his love only by loving in return. "How different our lives are now!," we said. Everything acquired new meaning. Everything changed. Also our relationships with others changed. Having experienced the love of God in such a forceful way it became spontaneous for us to pour out this love onto our brothers and sisters.

To love God as his children meant that we had to love our brothers and sisters who are all sons and daughters of the same God. In fact, if God was Love, we too, his sons and daughters, had to express this love in our

own lives. We are to be resplendent like small suns beside the Sun. Thus, our love for God in answer to his being love for us was immediately translated into love for our neighbor. Everyone that we met in our lives became the object of our attention, of our care, of our thoughtfulness.

Looking back more than forty years ago, to those initial experiences, they all seem so relevant and providential. God is Love. We must believe in his love and respond to his love by loving. These are the great demands of our day. These experiences form the essence of the answer that the world is waiting for today. To discover, or better still, to re-discover that God is Love is the greatest adventure that a person of our times can live.

But another discovery made during those years deeply influenced our lives. We understood that to love God meant to do his will. And doing the will of God became the practical expression of our love for him. But God and his will coincide with one another: to walk in the divine will means to walk in God. God was like the sun. A ray of this sun reaches each one of us and this ray is his divine will for me, for you, for each one of us. There is only one sun and there are many rays even though they are all rays of the same sun. There is only one God, one will.

Although God's will is various for each one of us, it is always the will of God. We understood that each of us has to walk along this ray without ever going off it. And we are to walk along this ray in the time that is given to us—now, later, tomorrow. The only time in our possession is the present moment and we have to engage all of our mind, heart and strength in accomplishing his will in every present moment.

Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev, co-president of the WCRP, and Greek Orthodox Bishop Anastasios together in the immense Tien'Anmen Square. In the background is the Palace of the Assembly of Peoples.

A traveler on a train doesn't think of walking up and down the aisle in order to reach his destination sooner. He remains seated and allows himself to be carried by the train. Likewise, in order to reach God we have to remain in his will. We have to carry out his will completely in every present moment.

By living like this *we got used to listening to that inner voice with growing attention. It was the voice of our conscience which underlined the will of God for us manifested in various ways. We were convinced that by living in this way, with the passing of time, we would have formed a magnificent design, a magnificent embroidery.*

The will of God! We experienced that his will is all love, and we can repeat that—with the grace of God—we have believed in his love and that he has not disappointed us. But everyone can experience it. The more we do the will of God, the more we walk towards peace. Yes, because when we do the will of God we insert ourselves in the great design that God has for each person and for all humanity.

Everyone has come to life from his heart. Everyone is the object of his love. God wants the greatest good for everyone. Who could love humanity more than God? Who knows the needs of humanity more than God? Who knows the true good of humanity more than God? I think that we all feel power- ►

Aram Muthukumaraswamy (India), Hindu, co-president of the WCRP, together with his wife Minoti. Below: Chinese Buddhist monks and Tibetan lamas were present at the opening ceremonies in Peking.

less when we are faced with the problem of peace, but we can all become builders of peace if we abandon ourselves in God by doing his will.

Chiara has said, "We have been created as a gift for those who are near us, and those who are near us have been created as a gift for us. Everything on earth is in a relationship of love with all the rest. Each one with all the others. We must be love in order to find the golden thread that links all creation."

Therefore we must love! There is a story of a martyr who was persecuted because of his faith, and who said to his executioners, "I am not afraid of you because I love you." This is the kind of love that overcomes fear. This is the kind of love that we want to have.

If we look for *the ultimate reason of every war we will always find that it is fear. Out of fear we take up arms. Out of fear we have reached the terrifying equilibrium which is nuclear armament.*

Love is the true antidote to fear. The true force capable of resisting the challenges of physical and moral violence. We must love everyone, not just a few.

We must take the initiative in loving and not wait for others to begin. We must turn to the poorest people, to the refugees, to the sick, to the hungry, to prisoners.... We must be at the service of everyone. We must make ourselves one with every person.

Peace! It could even seem to be an unattainable goal and indeed it would be unattainable if we relied on our own strength alone, if we did not count on the help of God. We will always have God's help if our lives are imbued with love of neighbor and love of God.

Love of neighbor and love of God nourish one another. The more our love of neighbor increases, the more our love for God grows and consequently the more our union with him in prayer grows. Likewise, the more our union with God grows, the more we are capable of loving our neighbor. Thus, the prayer that springs from love is indispensable for building true peace.

We can understand *now why a great movement of prayer for peace is rising up everywhere. This movement for peace is expressed in prayer vigils, marches, manifestations of faith. This year following the proposal of the Rissho Kosei Kai, a week of prayer for world peace will be held in New York. The high point of this week will be the presentation to the United Nations of an appeal for peace together with the testimony of multi-religious activities and ceremonies.*

The great novelty this year, as we all know, is the day of prayer for peace proclaimed by

A group of Chinese Taoist monks participated in the events.

John Paul II for the 27th of October in Assisi. An invitation has been extended to Christians of all communions and to believers of the world religions.

The Pope himself explained the reason for this day. Speaking to the members of the section for inter-religious dialogue of the World Council of Churches he said, "Prayer is one of the means through which humanity can be united. It places people in the attitude of accepting the will of God for themselves. Prayer changes the relationships of people who pray together. Those who pray together can neither ignore one another nor fight against one another. They discover that they are pilgrims going towards the same goal. They feel that they are brothers and sisters who are co-responsible for the same human family, and they recognize that they are sons and daughters of the same God and Father."

At the end of my *brief talk I would like to emphasize once more that believing in the love of God—which is also the heart of every prayer—is a daring and courageous spiritual adventure that can change many things around us.*

I would like to conclude by reading with you one of Chiara's prayers, uniting with her in this invocation of faith and hope:

"We can serve you, Lord, in our neighbor and in the neighbors who are beside us. We can serve you, Lord, in the works which you yourself have placed in our hands. But since you have molded our hearts and made them a little like yours, and since you have made us desire and will for all our brothers and sisters in the world what we would desire and will for ourselves, we have no choice but to return often to that temple which is your presence within us.

"In this way, we will be able to participate in your designs, in your plans, in the infinite expression of your mercy in order to draw as many people as possible out of the barbed wire of concentrated evil to the freedom of the sons and daughters of God. The boundaries of your love are so vast that no one is left out, and so infinite that no century is excluded." □

THE YOUNG

Compiled by Phyllis Scaringe

There are thousands of them all over the world determined to be builders of unity with as many young people as possible.

You may have heard of or seen the Gen 3 and still be unaware of the latest developments regarding them. The Gen 3 are youngsters—boys and girls—from ten to fifteen years of age who would amaze you with their concreteness. They are a new generation of the Focolare Movement, in fact, they are the third generation. They want to reach out to other youngsters and unite with them in bringing about a "revolution of love" all over the world. Their aim is to love God and set the hearts of young people everywhere on fire with the love of God. Unity, "that all may be one" is their goal.

Bombarded as we are by the consumer message that there's always something else we need to make us happy, it made me stop and think to see these youngsters respond in a diametrically opposed way. "We want to live the sharing, the communion of goods on a world-wide level starting from ourselves," one of the older ones told me simply and straight to the point. "Our standard of living should be determined by seeing first what other people's needs are. By recognizing what they don't have we can get a better idea of what is more than necessary for ourselves."

The gesture of Joe, an eleven and half year old from upstate New York speaks for itself. It was his own idea to put together his toys and sell them at a garage sale to raise money for hungry children in India. Or we can take the example of Anthony from Long Island who gave "all" his savings: a plastic bag of pennies, dimes and quarters, also for India.

The motivating force is love which often collides with the mentality in which we are conditioned. "When I understood the importance of the communion of goods," Maria, a gen 3 from Sao Paolo, Brazil,

FOR UNITY

wrote, "I automatically undid my watch strap. But then I lost courage and put it back on. I took it off and put it back on three times. Then I realized it was the right thing to do, I got my parents permission, and I gave it. Later on I remembered that I had a special perfume that I was saving in my drawer that I could give. I was so happy to have given everything."

Claude from Argentina said: "I never let anybody touch my collection of English books. I always thought that I would teach languages in a few years and I would need them. When I saw how the other Gen 3 live I realized I should keep for myself only what was essential without worrying about what I would need in the future."

For these youngsters, sharing is a gift. Those who have something to give, give it, but also for those who have nothing at all to give, it is likewise a gift to share what their needs are. What is important is to make one's talents and abilities available. What counts is the readiness to give. These youngsters realize this and just like in a close family there is no attitude at all of anyone being better than someone else, or of looking down on a person.

One girl confides: "It was very hard for me in the beginning because I knew I had nothing to give and I was too embarassed to say so in front of the others. Then little by little I understood that I could love and that was my all to be given."

"The Gen 3 want to reach out to other youngsters and unite with them in bringing about a 'revolution of love' all over the world.

What I have recounted up to now is certainly in sharp contrast with the pleasure-seeking mentality of our times. We are talking about possessing only what is essential while society invites us in a million ways to have always more than we need. Carla, a Gen 3 from Naples commented: "I was going to decorate my house for a party but our decorations were old. I wanted to go and buy new decorations but then I thought that I was just giving in to the consumer mentality. With a little imagination I fixed up the old decorations and made some new ones with the help of some paper, tape and magic markers. In the end the house was more beautiful than ever."

I don't think that they could make these decisions without first thinking over their choices or without experiencing an inner freedom. This would explain a document they drew up which states among other things: "Think well about things you are to buy so that you don't buy useless things; help your schoolmates and friends to be aware of the dangers of consumerism; help those who have ►

less or are poor not to feel inferior but instead help them rediscover their dignity: they have value for what they are, not for what they have."

Ideas such as these are laying the foundation for a new mentality for tomorrow's society. This is not an exaggerated claim if we look at the seriousness and concreteness of the lives of these youngsters from different backgrounds and cultures. They have a contagious vitality which has led to the birth of a new youth movement called "The Young for Unity Movement," an offshoot of the Gen 3 Movement. In 1984 these "young for unity" had this to say about themselves: "We are like everyone else: we go to school, we enjoy sports, we like to play ... but together with many other young people and adults we want to build a world that is like one big family."

These youngsters do not have the same total commitment that the Gen 3 have but through a variety of activities the Gen 3 have been reaching out to draw the interest of young people of every background: Catholics, Protestants, Jews, young people who don't believe in anything, to work for unity in the world and with them form the "Young for Unity Movement."

In May of 1985 Chiara Lubich, gave them a task: to unite themselves with all youngsters who suffer, particularly those suffering from hunger, and work to alleviate it. It is a "pathway" for them to follow in order to concretely contribute to unity in the world.

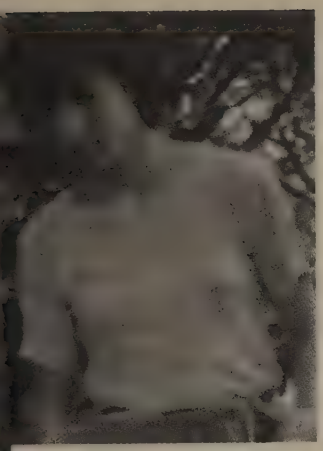
This challenge has sensitized youngsters all over the world to the needs of others in their own cities and in countries less fortunate than their own. They have responded by really putting their imagination to work.

The youth in economically better off cities and countries have been entrusted emerging nations to help.

I heard some of the experiences. When packages arrived in Argentina from the "young for unity" in Europe, the Argentinians called their group together to open them. They wrote back: "The packages you sent which were a result of your communion of goods made us feel one with all of you. We distributed the things among those who had the greatest need. We gave the clothing to a family where there are many children. We felt we had to go and look in our own closets to be sure that there was nothing more that was extra. The communion of goods truly creates a chain reaction."

From the Ivory Coast they wrote: "We used the money you sent us to pay for an urgently needed eye operation for a young boy named Paul."

To reach their goal and involve as many of their peers as possible "the Young for Unity" all over the world have undertaken a series of projects. In Central Africa they have been carrying on "Operation Bed" for the emigrants of the Sahel



Left: The Gen spontaneously shared whatever clothing or games they considered to be more than they needed. Below: Youth in economically better-off cities and countries have been entrusted third world countries to help so boxes of clothing and other goods are often sent on their way.

region; then there was a bazaar in Eindhoven, a handicrafts fair in Luxembourg, a "Fest for a United World" in Uruguay, and more.

The Gen 3 in Tucson, Arizona raised money by collecting and recycling bottles and aluminum cans and by renting a film, publicizing the showing and asking a donation admission with the proceeds going to India. They had two matinee showings with over fifty people. In San Antonio, Texas they held flea markets where they sold their own possessions. In New York one girl donated a big stuffed "Snoopy" to be raffled off along with other prizes. In Chicago they helped the younger age group, the gen 4, to make tickets to raffle off a huge stuffed clown they had received. They made over $200 to help the earthquake victims in Colombia.

In Los Angeles, the "young for unity" also held flea markets to help the children of migrant farmworkers in the San Joaquin valley in California.

Behind all of these projects lies a story of generosity and sacrifice. Their intention is not simply to raise funds but to be builders of unity, and involve as many other youth as possible in doing so.

The Gen 3 from Bombay, India wrote to the Gen World Center in Rome: "We want to thank the gen and the "Youth for Unity" for all that we have ►

On June 30, in the filled to capacity hall of the Mariapolis Center near Rome 700 boys and girls from all over Europe with a representation from the other continents gave to Dr. Arnoldo Farina, the president of UNICEF in Italy, their message to the United Nations. the message was signed by 60,000 members of the "Young for Unity Movement" from 64 different countries and from ten different religious traditions.

received for the pathway to help fight world hunger. This is how we decided to use the money: half of the sum was given to the Sisters of Dharavi who live and work in the biggest shantytown in the world called the "hell of Bombay," and the other half we gave to the Sisters of St. Augustine who take care of abandoned and handicapped children in Bombay. Please thank for us all the Gen 3 who so quickly answered Chiara's words. Thank them also in the name of all the children whom they'll probably never know but who, thanks to their generosity, will have their food problems taken care of at least for a few days. For us who live in India what the Gen are doing is very, very important, but it may be only in heaven that we will see its immense value."

The Gen don't have much and they are "just kids" but as one of their songs says: "We won't let this stop us. We don't have much, but what we have we want to give. Let's open our hearts and put together what we have."

Furthermore, they are the sign of a new mentality.We expect adults to give good example to young people but also the re-

Message to the United Nations

We are the "Young for Unity": boys and girls from every continent, from 160 different nations. We belong to different races, traditions, cultures, religions, but we have one great ideal in common.

There are thousands and thousands of us working enthusiastically for our goal—a more united world, the civilization of love.

We are not stopping to look at the negative aspects of society which are all around us and could easily rob us of all hope; instead we would rather be at the front lines in building a new world.

To start with, we have set out along one "pathway to unity", that is, facing the situation of hunger that exists among many children around the world. Our goal is to try and overcome the barrier that separates children living in poor countries from children who live in wealthy, economically developed countries.

We have already taken action and a worldwide network is in operation to bring about a communion of goods that helps those who have more, to share their extra out of love, and those who have less to take what is being offered with dignity and joy, just as in a family everything is shared. In fact, this is what we feel we are, a family spread all over the world where everything circulates only out of love.

We thought: if this civilization of love is possible among us, why shouldn't it be possible among everyone? We want to share our certainty and our hope with many, many children our age.

On the occasion of the revision of the Charter of the Rights of the Child and the 40th anniversary of UNICEF, we would like to assure your organization, so appropriately called the "United Nations," all our solidarity.

Rest assured—*and we hope this will give you joy and encouragement*—**you are not alone in your work at building unity in the world!**

Boys and girls, members of
the "Young for Unity Movement"

verse can happen. One example is the grandmother of a girl in Arezzo, Italy. After scolding her granddaughter for her excessive generosity she herself put together a big box of things saying: "Here are some valuable articles. I want to contribute too to the worldwide communion of goods."

Activities for fund raising are not all these youngsters do either. In Arizona the "young for unity" also regularly visit a nursing home where they put on plays and skits and seasonal parties for the residents. In New York a group from the Bronx wrote a script and acted out for a video tape an updated version of the life of St. Maria Goretti with great success. In Boston they also involved their friends in enacting for a video the life of a Gen who died in South America.

As one Gen said: "We can make things happen!" My aim, too, is not to remain a simple spectator but like that grandmother to respond to their invitation: "If you want, you can come with us. We'll work together for this pathway and reach out to many children who are hungry...." □

1) Chiara Lubich is the founder and president of the Focolare Movement of which the "Young for Unity Movement" is an offshoot.

WORK AND INDUSTRY

By ANTONIO MARIA BAGGIO

Confronted with the inhuman conditions of the working class, the Church emphasized the need to flank justice with love proposing radical social reforms.

For a long time the role the English had in the textile industry was to graze and shear sheep. As England began to produce cloth, an organization of work similar to the Flemish was adopted where a merchant-entrepreneur gave the wool to farmers to be worked. This work carried on in the home, which came to be called the "cottage industry system" escaped the controlling eye of the artisans guilds. Merchants were entrepreneurs as well as proprietors of the raw materials and tools and later on, once the phase of domestic work was surpassed, proprietors of the places of work. This is how it happened that the carriages which first crossed the countryside to stop in front of homes to drop off the raw materials now made the same trip to take another kind of "merchandise" to the factories: the workers.

Ode to the Machine

Improvements in the functioning of machinery were made by the workers themselves in the beginning but this space left for the intelligence of the worker didn't last long. Adam Ferguson, who had an important part in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution in England, observed that paradoxically, ignorance had become the mother of industriousness. His statement was based on the fact that many of the manual occupations were directed by machines and required neither judgment nor thought on the part of the worker. Machines reduced the frequency of human error. "Manufacturing is most prosperous when the mind is consulted least and when the workshop can be considered—without a great stretch of the imagination—as one whole machine with the workers as parts."[1]

People—like parts of a machine—wore themselves out to the point that entire generations were sacrificed on the altar of industry. The lack of complexity of the tasks encouraged the employment of women and children in inhumanly long workdays. It was not infrequent for ten year old children, for example, to fall asleep after fourteen hours of work and end up with an arm or leg crushed in a set of gears. It was common practice that once young workers reached adulthood they

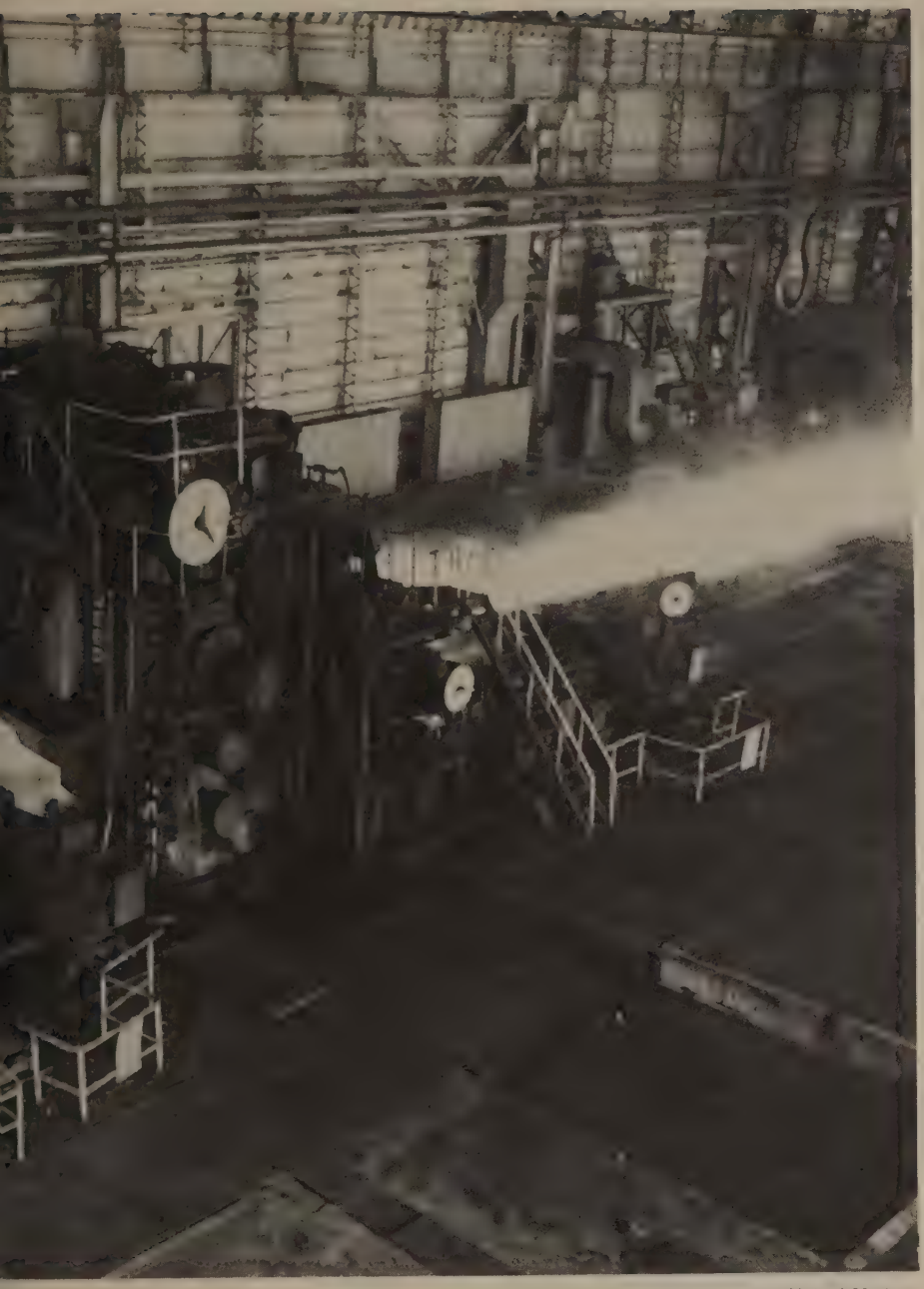


photo courtesy United Nations

The Industrial Revolution began in England in the late eighteenth century and quickly swept across Europe and the world. The nature of life and work underwent radical change as a new iron age began.

would be let go because adults had to be paid higher wages.

Andrew Ure, the enthusiastic defender of the factory system, explained that it wasn't difficult to invent automatic machinery but rather "the difficulty lay in obtaining the necessary discipline, for people to give up their irregular work habits and identify themselves with the invariable regularity of the great machine."[2]

If, after several years of this discipline, some negative reaction was observed, it was considered the signal to the overseers that the time to be let go had arrived. On the other hand, these young workers were unemployed for a relative length of time if we recall that in the early decades of the Industrial Revolution the average factory worker did not live to see the age of thirty. Statistics of averages, though, hide more at times than they reveal. Perhaps workers did live somewhat longer. Perhaps it was the children who had a very high mortality rate that skewed the statistics.... We do know for a fact that mothers who worked soon became as indifferent to family life as their husbands. Exhaustion prevented them from giving adequate nourishment and care to their children.

The Catholic Avant-Garde

The Industrial Revolution took several decades to spread throughout Europe. Gradually as industrialism advanced the Church became increasingly aware of the problem.

Charitable initiatives of various kinds sprung up everywhere, like that of the Frenchman, Frederick Ozanam, who assisted the new industrial poor. These initiatives in themselves weren't new in the Church. New however were the studies and inquiries of some lay Catholics who recognized the changing times. People like Fodere' and Villerme', doctors, and Villeneuve-Bargemont, (a prefect in government who wrote about conditions in the French textile industry) were—because of their professions—placed in close contact with the social changes and recognized that the traditional forms of charity were no longer sufficient. Legal protection of the weakest, social insurance, a progressive political system to transform the structures which had been built by economic liberalism had all become necessary.

These people envisioned as a solution aid to the poor on the ►

part of the government or the upper classes, influenced by Christianity. They felt that self-help was not an adequate way to solve the problem. (These were the years when the French wool workers used their wooden shoes "*sabot*"—from which the word sabotage is derived—to intentionally break the machinery. Acts such as these led nowhere but showed that the workers had not accepted the harsh conditions of early industrialization.

These Catholics however fell short of their goals. They were few and often misunderstood yet their works drew attention to the inequities going on. It wasn't unusual, for example, for the bishop of Annecy to write to the king of Sardinia in 1845 in a document entitled: "Notes on the Worker Question" to refer to the worker population as if it were a separate organized class that the law discriminated against. His letter revealed that although all were officially equal as citizens, workers had no protection, as such, before the law.

We find that also other bishops of the times were accurately informed and desirous of reform. Therefore as Tommaso Sorgi[3] points out we shouldn't undervalue the ideas and initiatives of Catholics during these years. They were times in which concrete ideas of social reform were just starting to come up. The maturity of the times didn't allow much more. It will take decades before Catholics discover the social implications of their faith.

The Bishop and the Classes

Capitalism was forcefully imposing itself with facts and there were not as yet suitable ideas by which to judge them. Ideas were needed. For this reason Baron von Ketteler, bishop of Mainz, Germany, studied also the socialist's writings. When he traveled from Germany to Rome for the first Vatican Council he carried with him the first volume of Marx's *Das Kapital,* which was as yet little known.

The "facts" for Ketteler were that society had become fragmented: this was the real result of the much celebrated freedom brought about by liberalism. The working class had been "dissolved into many individual and separate workers, leaving each one worn out." Every worker was alone to face the power of money which was becoming always more concentrated. "Against the isolation of the working classes," sustained Ketteler, "a powerful push was given to the union and organization of workers. This trend to organize workers, to obtain—through common efforts—the protection of their interests and rights, is nothing other than right and just. Not only, but it is necessary if the working class is not to be crushed by the power of concentrated money."[4]

Ketteler backed up his statements by supporting the workers' requests to reduce working hours, increase wages and allow days off for holidays. Also at the request of the workers, the bishop prohibited factory work for women and children in view of the deleterious effects it had on health and morals.

Ketteler also reminded workers to be prudent and not to get carried away in claiming their rights; if a factory or mill failed, in fact, capital would be invested again somewhere else but it was difficult for a worker to find another job. We shouldn't interpret this to mean, however, that he was inviting them to give up their claims. On the contrary, strikes were sacrosanct for Ketteler just as were workers' organizations. He made this statement loud and clear at a gathering of families of workers in July of 1869. The fact was that Ketteler had in mind examples of employers and workers who had working agreements and this was the kind of reciprocity he was trying to extend. They were initiatives promoted by Catholic industrialists who gave concrete material help to the workers. These works were an expression of the "patronage" that Le Play, a French Catholic social reformer of the 1800's, had written so much about. It was a kind of fatherly and protective role that the management would exercise on behalf of the lower classes. Le Play's idea of joint initiatives between employers and workers however did not go beyond the level of "assistance" whereas Ketteler advocated more. Even the famous "Christian Corporation of Val-de-Bois" founded by Leon Harmal maintained the workers in a firmly subordinate role to

photo courtesy United Nations

ownership. In reality these initiatives helped the workers climb out of material and moral misery but remained—because of their application—within a paternalistic framework. They did however spread the corporative idea throughout the Christian social movement.

Ketteler's intellectual journey is enlightening. He began by encouraging charitable works, than came to understand that without justice they are not enough, and that reforms are necessary at all levels. He came to value always more highly the worker's identity and culture. At the basis of his point of view was the Christian concept of property which must be in function of the common good but also widely extended. The production cooperatives that Ketteler advocated served to extend participation in the income workers created and went beyond a relationship based on salary which, although not condemned, was neither considered the best way to be compensated for one's work. He viewed salaries as payment of a contract which inevitably fixed the social division between employer and worker. Many of these Catholic reformers wanted to change the system of a salaried wage as compensation (which would have meant overturning the system itself) remaining however within a paternalistic framework.

The Socialist Baron

Baron von Vogelsang, for example, was one of those who wanted to change the system of a salaried wage. Through Ketteler he became a convert to Catholicism in 1850. Because of his conversion he had to emigrate to Austria where he collaborated in writing a Catholic newspaper called "Vaterland" and several years later founded a magazine. Like Ketteler, his starting point was the need to rebuild the social body fragmented by individualism, competition and materialism: all principles introduced by liberalism which was the ideology of the dominant industrial system. Like Ketteler, he did not believe in economic liberty even if it was corrected by almsgiving. This was what Catholics thought who led active roles in the liberalist society and were content with it.

Vogelsang's world, on the contrary. was that of the German military-feudal nobility

(Continued on page 28)

"Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."
(Romans 15:7)

This new word of life restores brotherly love to our lives. What led Paul to make this statement, though? The different cultural and religious backgrounds of the members of the early Christian communities could have disrupted their harmony and unity. The communities, for example, in the Greco-Roman regions were composed of persons coming in part from Judaism and in part from paganism. There could have been, therefore, bias and prejudice towards each other regarding how to interpret particular rules of worship. This was the case of the Roman community which Paul is addressing here.

The example given by Jesus was the most effective means Paul could find to overcome these problems. Jesus had welcomed without distinction those coming from both Judaism and paganism. Since they had both embraced the gospel and been redeemed by him they now formed a new people. As Jesus had done, so too, should Christians accept one another even if of different mentalities.

"Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

The gospels portray Jesus during his earthly life as having a disposition of acceptance which knew no limits. He welcomed everyone especially the lowliest, the defenseless, the outcast. The reason even public sinners and those considered far from God sought him out was because they felt totally accepted by him.

But it was during the Passion above all that Jesus showed us this infinitely accepting love of his. He went beyond our lack of understanding, ungratefulness and betrayals which he saw and foresaw and forgave us and accepted us with immense love.

"Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

Jesus showed us therefore that to love means to accept others as they are, just as he accepted each one of us. It means to accept others with their shortcomings, their ideas, their personality. It implies that we leave room for them within us, doing away with every form of prejudice, judgment and self-centeredness.

We might well consider this one of the toughest points of the Christian message because it conflicts with our nature wounded as it is by sin.

We are all very different from one another and, furthermore, we are selfish and often at odds with one another. We are instinctively led to distance ourselves from others or to reject them for fear that they may pose a threat to our autonomy, our comfort, our very existence. It is in this unruly instinct that take root all the offenses against the human person for which humanity suffers today. We could name some of the more apparent effects. Civil strife, wars of every kind, racial discrimination, abortion, euthanasia, and so forth.

Jesus was sent by the Father to save mankind, every human being, and to reunite the family of the children of God. Jesus did this accepting us as we are.

By accepting this poor and sinful humanity, he destroyed hatred and all barriers by inserting into history a new force, the only one that can enable us to ovecome all our divisions. In this way he gave the Father immense glory and joy.

"Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has

welcomed you, for the glory of God."

How then can we live this word of life? By accepting our neighbor with all his or her rights (the right to life, to work, to a just wage, to a home, to freedom, etc.), and needs (the need for respect, for justice, for understanding, for affection...). This word asks us to welcome the child newly conceived in the womb, as well as the elderly, the sick, the poor, the handicapped, the outcast, everyone different from us. It asks us to welcome our adversaries, our enemies.

This word of life tells us, furthermore, that we will never give as much glory to God as when we make every effort to accept our neighbor. It is then, in fact, that we lay the foundation for universal brotherhood and nothing gives greater joy to God than true unity among us. Unity—as we know—attracts the presence of Jesus among us, and his presence transforms everything.

Let us then approach every individual neighbor with the attitude of free acceptance, and with the desire of working towards establishing mutual love.

Chiara Lubich

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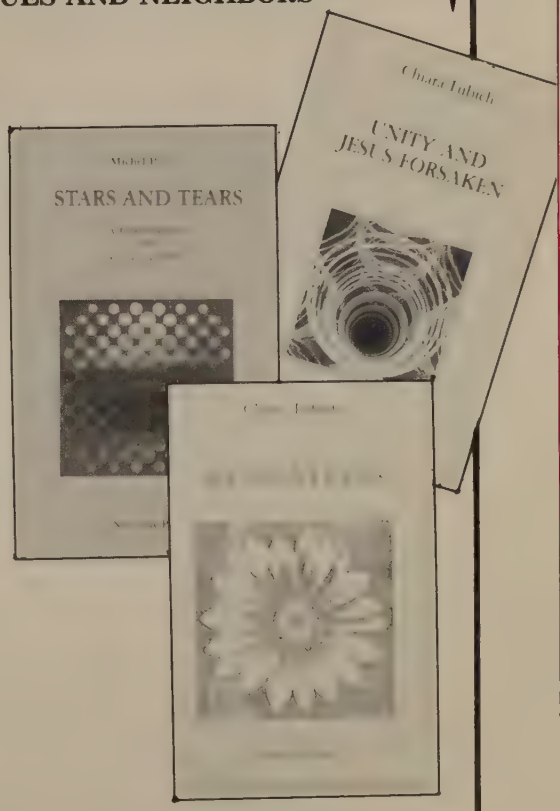

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HOW TO STOP TIME

At one time or another we have all wished we could stop time. Speaking to a group of children years ago Chiara Lubich shared with them a solution she found: "to live the present moment well, with all one's heart, mind, soul and strength, letting go of everything that is not the will of God thereby making of each action a beautifully wrapped package presentable to God."

"Today" is a column in which we share experiences reflecting the efforts of people to live this experience of making the most of the moments which fill the day. They just might help us all to live days that will remain forever.

For a couple of weeks now my young daughter has not wanted to go to bed at her usual hour and bedtime has become a battleground for both of us. She tries to think of as many ways to put off sleeping—drinks of water, visits to the bathroom, stories and finally tears. I find myself more and more tense each night and I lose patience with her.

Today I realized we were getting nowhere and that I had not been loving her at all. For some time she has been asking for a particular story to be read and I usually avoid it because it is long and repetitious but tonight I suggested we read this book and I made a big effort to tell the story well and read it slowly, not skipping along as I usually do. The hundredfold for me was that this time I really enjoyed it! She was so happy and quite content to go to sleep. I don't know if it will be as easy as this every night but I know my only "tactic" is to recognize Jesus in her and love.

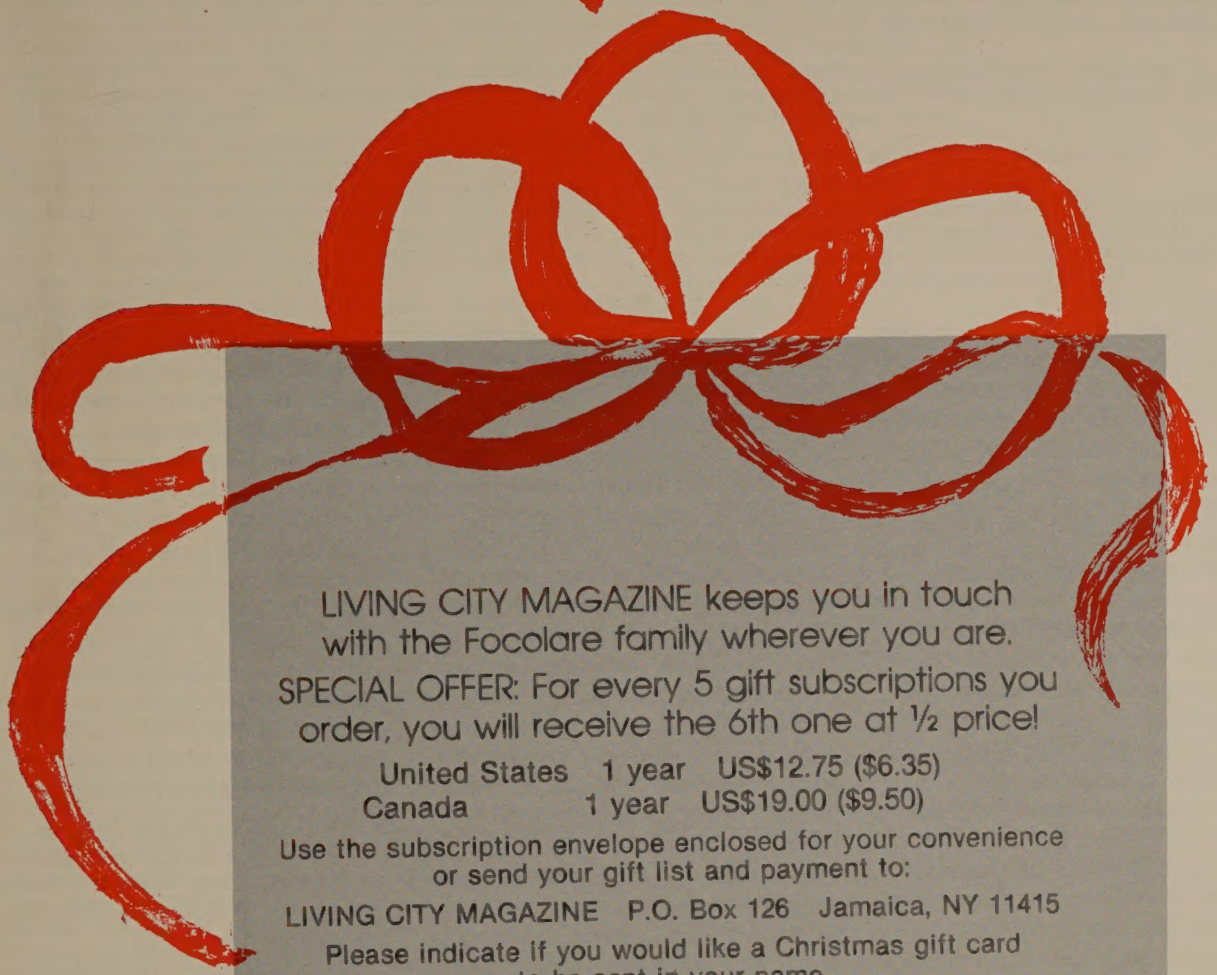
D.M.

Today I woke up feeling irritable and tired. (I had been up during the night with one of my children). My first thought was how would I get through my day: it seemed impossible that I would find the strength to do all I had planned. As I prepared breakfast I glanced at the Word of Life for that month, "May I never boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through it the world has been crucified to me and I to the world." I read the commentary again and realized that I needed to choose Jesus crucified immediately, not as the commentary suggested, with resignation but by actively loving him in the struggles that this day might bring. I put a smile on my face and continued with breakfast! I saw that my husband was late for work, and offered him a ride to the train station. The children seemed to sense my change of heart and I had them dressed and ready to go in no time at all!

On the way back they wanted to stop off at the playground and I said another 'yes' knowing that this would involve chasing my one and a half year old up and down the Jungle Gym for the next hour! When we got back, a friend asked me to look after her baby while she took her sister to the airport. I noticed that instead of feeling a little overwhelmed, I felt that with each act of love came renewed strength. Moment by moment I tried to remain faithful to my choice, forgetting about myself and seeing to the needs of my family and each neighbor that I met as the day progressed. That evening I felt really happy, full of a peace that can only come by loving this way.

M.D.

1986 CHRISTMAS



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SPECIALS

(Continued from page 23)
which came always more under the control of the new moneyed aristocracy. Between the old nobility and the new rich there was a radical conflict of interests and values. The cries of the nobility found welcome ears among the small land owners who were suffering for the same reasons, as well as the small industries and craftsmen to which the advances of the big enterprises were causing the demise. It was to this world in decline that Vogelsang culturally belonged.

This leads us to see another element in the critical position of many Catholics of the time as they faced industrial society. Besides the desire for innovation there was also a refusal to abandon the values and forms of the former life style, a fear of risking to lose them in the process of change.

Vogelsang however thought that: "The solution of the worker question, justice towards the working class, can not be other than the ending of the worker class, that is, its assimilation into the ownership ranks." The political project of Vogelsang, which was the the corporative organization of society, had as its intention to overcome social divisions through forms alternative to the socialist model. It was to be based on what he called "the Stand:" which was an ensemble of those who were in the same economic sector and the same production although having different functions. The differences arising among those performing different tasks would fact was that these accomplishments were not the specific patrimony of the corporative idea. In France, in fact, there were Catholic groups be resolved within "the Stand" which would then compactly defend their common interests within society. Instead "the Klasse" that Vogelsang intended to overcome would be a strata of equals who performed a similar activity in different sectors of production.

How should we interpret this corporative project? In the progressive sense of Ketteler who sought the protection and emancipation of the worker class or in the regressive sense which aimed exclusively at constituting joint associations of Catholic employers and workers in view of corporation but which might have distracted the workers from defending their rights? Vogelsang's good faith was beyond question; his work testifies to it, but then what can we draw from his ideas?

The Medieval Future

This theoretical uncertainty between the flight forward toward an unachievable utopia and the nostalgic glance backward toward a medieval Christian corporate system of the past was again reproposed by two French friends, both nobles and officers: Count Albert de Mun and Marquis Rene de La Tour du Pin. Once again, their activities bore good concrete results, (like their legislation on work), and are not in question, however the which did not take the corporative idea into consideration and had accomplished excellent programs of assistance particularly in the field of credit.

For de Mun the origin of all evils lay in the French Revolution and his program for social restoration was based on a clear anti-modern choice.

La Tour du Pin wanted the "restoration of the Christian state" and he linked the corporative organization to a monarchical state order. Both he and de Mun, in fact, took an extremely rightist position when it came to the institutional question. We shouldn't be amazed then that the social model of La Tour du Pin was declaredly medieval.

But these were only the beginnings of the corporative idea which would have much greater impact among Catholics in the 1900's. Beyond the corporative idea, however, at this time we also see reflected the need for the unity of the social body. It was present in all the Catholic initiatives of this period which never had only economic ends just as the analogous socialist initiatives were never separated from revolutionary aspirations.

What matters is that the social question was brought to the fore and that in the mentality of Catholics it is beginning to be seen as intimately connected to the patrimony of faith, justice as part of doctrine.

□

1) Adam Ferguson, "History of Civil Society"; 2) Andrew Ure, "Philosophy of Manufacturing"; 3) Tommaso Sorgi, "Christian Social Movements" Ekklesia, 1967; 4) W. E. von Ketteler, "Worker Movements."

What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

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